

Buddhism as religion and Relevance of the teachings of the Buddha for the modern World

Gopala M P

Assistant Professor of History, Government Arts, Commerce and Post Graduate College, Hassan-573201

Date of Submission: 20-07-2023

Date of Acceptance: 31-07-2023

ABSTRACT: Buddhism, as one of the four major religions in the world today, is an empiricist and anti-meta-physical religion. It does not accept anything which cannot be experienced either through the senses or extrasensory perception. People in the world are hurriedly getting ready for the next millennium or the 21st century. Our prime intention here is to identify the relevance of the teachings of the Buddha for this modern so called scientifically and technologically developed world. Today, Business Administration is one of the hot subjects in college curricula around the world. In this area, however, Buddhism has its own unique management theory and practice, which has evolved over a long period of time. As early as Sakyamuni Buddha's time, the sangha community has had a well-developed administration system. Over time, the system endured numerous changes and evolved sophisticated methods of management and leadership. In the Avatamsaka Sutra, commenting on the "Three Refuges," Buddha said: "Taking refuge in the Sangha means one should make the Sangha a well-administered and harmonious community for all sentient beings." From this comment, it can be seen that Buddhist sangha communities were organizations that excelled in managerial skills. Also as per the population of India, less than 2% of the population of modern India is Buddhist. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that India's importance for Buddhism and its art is mainly its historical influence. Not only is India the country where the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, lived and taught, but it is the land where the first images of the Buddha were produced and where Buddhist iconography and symbolism evolved. Being a student whose family originates in India, I am interested in some of the historical aspects and influences of Buddhist Art in India are discussed in next section. The plan of this paper is as follows; the detailed discussion of Buddhism and Science is given in second section. The third section includes

the discussion of Buddhism and economics and management and how are related to each other and followed by Buddhism and arts is detailed account given in the section. The conclusions points out in the final section of the paper

I. INTRODUCTION

The Buddha was born in the 6th century B.C in India. He discovered the reality behind phenomena in our Universe. In the world there is nothing permanent as well as nothing isolatedly existing but everything coexists. He realized this. Interdependence is the great truth of life. He was neither a divine being, nor a man as we know him, but a man par excellence (accariyamanussa). There is no equivalent in a western language for this concept accariyamanussa. This means not thought of, a not comparable kind of being. There is no word in English unless use the term Buddha with this concept in mind. His teaching is mainly focused on man himself. People are born again and again, and die again and again. There is no ending to be cognized. This was the question which arose in him and which he found a positive answer. That is why he is a Buddha.

He realized that it was not only man but the whole Universe that is composed of ever-changing phenomena. When this truth arose in his mind he contemplated and reasoned out a solution through his intuitive wisdom. He comprehended that it was because of birth that one has to face decay, death, lamentation, despair and all types of satisfactoriness. He saw this causal relationship in phenomena and realized that the way to end decay death and satisfactoriness is to end birth. So he grappled with what might be the cause for birth. He realized that its cause was becoming. And becoming arises because of grasping. Why do we grasp things in the world? Because of craving. That was the causal relation he unraveled.

Today in this scientifically and technologically developed global village, though there are many amenities, for easy living and pleasure, people are both physically and mentally not satisfied and do not have a feeling of security. Both satisfaction and security are experience of the mind. Safety can refer to freedom from physical danger. When the mind is satisfied that the person is free of physical danger, the mind produces an experience of safeness. When one does not feel mentally secure, one is unhappy. In society there are many people who are not secure. They are always in fear and dread. This was crystal clear during the time of the JVP insurgency in 1988-89. We know very well that most of the high personages (VIP) of this country, even though they had a number of security personnel and perhaps two three houses to change to, from time to time, were mentally insecure. Not only such high personages but also most ordinary people in the country were panicking at that time. The reason was that they were not feeling mentally secure.

The Buddha said "Mind is the forerunner and mental states are mind made". So, mind is the most significant thing in one's life. According to the teachings of the Buddha, man is the component of five aggregates, namely: form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness. Of the five only form is physical and the other four are mental. These mental faculties are very important in contemplating man. But in modern science and technology, which produce many things for the physical benefit of man the mental factors, are not sufficiently recognized. Think this is because of the philosophy behind science. However, it is one of the fundamental principles of science that we do not accept anything un-experimented with or and un-observed. This is the time for scientists to open out and think of the other dimensions of life such as Religion. A Religion like Buddhism, cannot be set aside any more. Most of the world population follows a religion. Therefore scientists should give a place to the experience of religion and should consider religious teachings as being integral to man. We can be certain, that Buddhism provides vast knowledge about man and his mental and physical development.

In the world today, there are many multinational and multipurpose projects which are vast for the development of countries. But people are not satisfied with what they have. There is no contentment. Craving, grasping, and arising and perishing are the main features in the world. As science is predominant in the world today, scientists can take a new step for the advancement of science through recognition of ethical and

religious dimension. The Dhamma taught by the Buddha is not something outside the world and beyond experience. Therefore it is not contrary to science.

BUDDHISM AND SCIENCE

"Buddha is the greatest scientist in the history of mankind." I have often heard this at bana sermons. This is completely wrong. Scientists are people who are constrained to work solely within and accept only, the knowledge generated by the scientific method. They generally reject knowledge generated by the other method. The Buddha did not use the scientific method and therefore he is not a scientist. Of the two methods of acquiring knowledge available to the human being the Buddha used the right brain centered intuition method; whereas the western approach to acquiring knowledge used the left brain method. The Buddha trained his mind to an extreme high state of enlightenment (Buddhahood) from where he could understand the true reality of nature in its totality.

It is based on such knowledge that he propounded a philosophy which is most conducive to balanced and happy living which leads to living in harmony with others, living in harmony with nature, meaningful living devoid of stress, anxiety, jealousy and empty pride, ultimately ending up in a meaningful state full of bliss. That was over 2500 years ago. Science began much later. Science is often explained as systematic formulated knowledge. It is knowledge needed to understand the phenomena that we observe and those that influence our lives. For the early man science represented a cumulative process of increasing knowledge and ability to understand what is around him. It also meant a sequence of victories over ignorance and superstition. During the time of the Buddha, science was still speculative explanation of common sense observations by intellectuals who devoted much of their time for thinking and understanding natural phenomena. Science helped to develop technology essential for producing things needed to make life more comfortable. During the seventeenth century the French Mathematician Rene Des Cartes restricted the scope of science to only what is material by bifurcating the universe as matter (*res extensa*) and mind (*res cogitans*) and limiting science to the study of the former.

The science that evolved on the basis of Cartesian bifurcation was confined to material objects within the limits of perception of human sensory organs which are unable to perceive anything that extended beyond three spatial dimensions. The above constraints on science stood

on the way of achieving its desired objective of understanding the true reality of nature, because nature and natural phenomena are neither confined to matter nor to three spatial dimensions. Many of the important phenomena of nature therefore happened to be outside the scope of science. Science, nevertheless, has provided enormous material benefits to mankind. Therefore people all over the world have very high confidence in science and accept anything explained to them in terms of science. The ultimate aim of science is understanding the true reality of nature, minimizing human suffering and making human beings happy by way of providing material comforts. The Buddha's way of acquiring knowledge by intuition was not subject to the limitations that stifled science and therefore unlike science the knowledge that the Buddha acquired is complete and represents the true reality of nature. This is confirmed by over 2500 years of experience. For this reason the Buddha did not have any grey areas that need to be hidden under a cloud of imaginary superhuman force. Just as in science Buddhism does not require its followers to have dogmatic belief in anything that the Buddha taught.

The Buddha advised people not to blindly accept what he taught, but research on them for themselves before accepting. For this reason his teachings have remained unaltered and valid for all times and under all circumstances. While the knowledge the Buddha acquired represents the true reality of nature, what scientists aspire to understand as the ultimate destination of the scientific method, is also the same true reality of nature. While the goal of the teachings of the Buddha is elimination of human suffering and making human beings happy and contented by way of training their minds and creating self-discipline in them, the goal of science is providing mankind with material comforts. In 1905 Albert Einstein broke through the three dimensional barrier in science and took the scope of science beyond three spatial dimensions and Des Cartes restrictions. This enabled man to aspire for a more realistic view of nature and natural phenomena through the scientific method. Modern twentieth century science that developed after transcending the dimensional barrier by twentieth century scientists such as Albert Einstein, Erwin Schrodinger, Louis de Broglie, Paul Dirac, Werner Heisenberg, Richard Feynman, Murray Gellman, Sir Arthur Eddington and Stephen Hawkin is based on the theory of relativity, quantum mechanics and uncertainty.

BUDDHISM AND ECONOMICS

"Right Livelihood" is one of the requirements of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. It is clear, therefore, that there must be such a thing as Buddhist economics. Buddhist countries have often stated that they wish to remain faithful to their heritage. So Burma: "The New Burma sees no conflict between religious values and economic progress. Spiritual health and material well-being are not enemies: they are natural allies." Or: "We can blend successfully the religious and spiritual values of our heritage with the benefits of modern technology." Or: "We Burmans have a sacred duty to conform both our dreams and our acts to our faith.

This we shall ever do." All the same, such countries invariably assume that they can model their economic development plans in accordance with modern economics, and they call upon modern economists from so-called advanced countries to advise them, to formulate the policies to be pursued, and to construct the grand design for development, the Five-Year Plan or whatever it may be called. No one seems to think that a Buddhist way of life would call for Buddhist economics, just as the modern materialist way of life has brought forth modern economics. Economists themselves, like most specialists, normally suffer from a kind of metaphysical blindness, assuming that theirs is a science of absolute and invariable truths, without any presuppositions. Some go as far as to claim that economic laws are as free from "metaphysics" or "values" as the law of gravitation. We need not, however, get involved in arguments of methodology. Instead, let us take some fundamentals and see what they look like when viewed by a modern economist and a Buddhist economist.

The Buddhist point of view takes the function of work to be at least threefold: to give man a chance to utilize and develop his faculties; to enable him to overcome his ego-centeredness by joining with other people in a common task; and to bring forth the goods and services needed for a becoming existence. Again, the consequences that flow from this view are endless. To organize work in such a manner that it becomes meaningless, boring, stultifying, or nerve-racking for the worker would be little short of criminal; it would indicate a greater concern with goods than with people, an evil lack of compassion and a soul-destroying degree of attachment to the most primitive side of this worldly existence. Equally, to strive for leisure as an alternative to work would be considered a complete misunderstanding of one of the basic

truths of human existence, namely that work and leisure are complementary parts of the same living process and cannot be separated without destroying the joy of work and the bliss of leisure.

BUDDHISM AND ARTS

Therefore, my study of this topic extends to two of the most important periods of Buddhist art in India, the Kushan and the Gupta Periods. The Kushan period is the period in which the first human images of the Buddha appeared. Here will briefly discuss the Mathura region and will primarily focus on the styles and attributes of sculptures from the Gandharan region. This discussion will illustrate how regional differences contributed in developing two distinct styles of art within the same period. Therefore, I will briefly discuss the history and location of the Gandharan region. I will focus on the Gandharan Bodhisattva (2nd/3rd century, made of schist) displayed in the Art Institute. Next, the paper will discuss the Gupta Dynasty, this is period in which the culture of the period was more concerned with aesthetic values of sculpture, which I will illustrate through my discussion of the Preaching Buddha of Sarnath (c. 475 ad, Buff Sandstone). As a result, the art from the Gandharan region will show how regional location and influences affected this period's sculpture, and the art from the Gupta Period will illustrate how aesthetic preferences of the culture influenced the sculpture of this period. By discussing the Gandharan Bodhisattva and Preaching Buddha from Sarnath, we can see that the art of Buddhism in India reflects the ideals and the sophisticated aesthetics of the varied regions and periods in which it flourished. In early Buddhist art, the Buddha was merely symbolized by a wheel, a bodhi tree, or a stupa. Not until the Kushan period [AD 50-250], during the reign of Kanishka I, was the historic Buddha represented in human form. The creation of a Buddha image in human form corresponded to the theological changes influenced by Mahayana Buddhism taking place in the religion. Two distinct styles of sculpture emerged during the Kushan period, one associated with the region of Gandhara and the other with the city of Mathura in northern India. There is much debate in which region these first images appeared, and such discussion is not relevant to my thesis. What is relevant is that these two regions developed two distinctly different styles of sculpture.

II. CONCLUSION

One of the greatest potentials of the interface between Buddhism and science is that Buddhists may encourage scientists to question their materialistic assumptions and incorporate sophisticated systems of contemplative inquiry within the scientific community. This may give rise to the first true revolution in the mind sciences, which is bound to have profound repercussions for the rest of science and humanity at large. Likewise, scientists may encourage Buddhists to question their own assumptions, to revitalize their own traditions of contemplative inquiry, and to integrate them with the empirical methods of modern science. In short, Buddhists and scientists may help each other in overcoming their tendencies to dogmatism and replace this with a fresh and open-minded spirit of empiricism.

The twentieth-century disengagement of ethics from scientific inquiry, based upon an illusory division between facts and values and the myth of value-free science has been disastrous for humanity. Not only for the sake of human flourishing, but for the very existence of human civilization, we are now faced with the challenge to evolve spiritually so that we can adapt to the rapid changes in the social and natural environment so that we may survive and possibly flourish as never before in history.

REFERENCES

- [1]. By Bhikkhu Seelananda, Paramitakadugannawa .09.04.2000
- [2]. <http://www.metta.lk/english/century21.htm>
- [3]. "The Economic Role of Buddhism in China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 16, (1957): 408-14.
- [4]. Apparently less well known is Alexander W. MACDONALD's "Bouddhism et Sociologie," *Archives de Sociologie des Religions*, Juillet-December 1956, no. 2 (1956): 88-97.
- [5]. *A Buddhist Approach to Management*, Venerable Master Hsing Yun Translated by Otto Chang, Ph.D., Buddha's Light Publishing, 3456 S. Glenmark Drive Hacienda Heights, CA 91745 U.S.A. © January 2006.
- [6]. "The Two Periods of Buddhist Art in India. (1969, December 31) from
- [7]. *Buddhism and Modern Science* - by Dr. Granville Dharmawardena, University of Colombo from <http://www.beyondthenet.net/misc/science2.htm>
- [8]. "Buddhist Economics" was first published in *Asia: A Handbook*, edited by Guy Wint, published by Anthony Blond Ltd., London, 1966.